

STUDENT VISA IMMIGRATION REGULATIONS & STUDENT ENGAGEMENT POLICY

1. This guidance has been created as a means of ensuring that UK Home Office policies and expectations, the University's sponsorship requirements and the requirements of student visa holders at the University are all aligned.

2. Although this policy forms a part of the University's regulations, it is underpinned by the UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) policies published at <https://www.gov.uk/student-visa>.

3. Please note that visa application requirements may differ from country to country, but the University's requirements of students who hold a student visa are all split simply into 2 categories.

4. Students can enter the University as sponsored students on one of 2 routes: as a short-term student (on a programme requiring less than 6 months of study) or as a degree student (on a programme requiring a year or more of study).

5. Short term students are issued with a General Visitor Visa for their stay in the UK. This allows them to:

- a. stay for up to 6 months
- b. study on a short programme or suite of courses
- c. travel

This visa does NOT allow students to:

- d. work in any capacity
- e. access public funding
- f. access NHS medical care
- g. bring dependents to the UK

The University strongly recommends travel insurance to all students on General Visitor Visas.

6. Degree students or year-long visiting students are issued with a Student Route Visa for their stay in the UK. This allows for them to*:

- a. stay for the length of their programme, usually with an additional 1 to 4-month wrap up period at the end
- b. study on a longer programme
- c. travel
- d. work up to 20 hours per week during term time and full time outside of term time
- e. access NHS medical care (as an NHS surcharge is paid at the point of application)

This visa does NOT allow students to:

- f. work full time during published term dates
- g. access public funding

*This visa may allow students to bring dependents with them to the UK—this will depend on the FHEQ level of the programme.

7. In both cases (General Visitor Visa or Student Route Visa) the student is expected to engage fully with their programme of study.

8. The University expects students to attend classes in person and engage with the academic programme on which they are enrolled. Student engagement is defined as action taken by the student to be actively involved in their programme of study and the University expects students to engage with their courses by attending their classes, submitting relevant set work and registering for each semester. Student engagement also includes attendance at one-to-one tutorials with faculty instructors, attendance or engagement with group study meetings, attendance or engagement at academic advising appointments, attendance at appointments during office hours or other person to person meetings.

9. Students who have mitigating circumstances for not engaging in their programme for a period of time should contact Student Affairs to discuss their personal circumstances. The University can offer support and guidance for re-engaging with classes after a period of time away and/or offer further support for taking a Leave of Absence (LoA) if this becomes necessary.

10. Students who are sponsored on a student visa in the UK are required by UKVI to engage with their programme regularly. As the student's sponsor, the University is legally required to report lack of attendance and engagement to the Home Office. This can result in a student's visa being curtailed if s/he fails to engage with their programme.

11. For the benefit of doubt, every sponsored student must:

- a. Complete courses and earn credits consistently through their period of study:
 - i. It is expected that an undergraduate student sponsored on a visa should earn a minimum of 9 US credits per semester or 18 US credits per year.
 - ii. It is expected that a postgraduate student sponsored on a visa should earn a minimum of 8 US credits per semester, totalling 36 US credits over the programme.
 - iii. If a student is unable to achieve the minimum credit threshold, their progress will be reviewed by the Academic Progress Committee (APC) and an intervention will follow to try to get the student back on track academically.
 - iv. If the student is consistently unable to progress after measures are put in place, the University Exam Board may choose to academically dismiss the student which will trigger the University's obligation to report the end of sponsorship to the UK Home Office.

- b. Maintain good academic standing each semester:
 - i. Undergraduate students are expected to achieve a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 throughout their studies at the University. If a student falls below this average, s/he will be placed on academic probation and will be limited to 12 US credit hours per semester.
 - ii. Postgraduate students are expected to achieve a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 throughout their studies at the University. If a student falls below this average, s/he will be placed on academic probation and will be unable to progress to the thesis/internship stage of the programme. This may mean that the students needs to repeat courses to raise their GPA.
 - iii. Failure to maintain good academic standing may delay a student's progress and cause the student to be unable to complete his/her programme in the allotted timeframe. As above, the University Exam Board may choose to academically dismiss the student which will trigger the University's obligation to report the end of sponsorship to the UK Home Office.

- c. Complete the programme within the allotted time frame of the visa:
 - i. At the start of the programme, the student will be issued with a visa for the duration of his/her studies.
 - ii. In rare cases, the student may not be able to complete his/her programme within the allocated time frame. If this is the case, and there is evidence of good academic progress and achievement, the University may decide to support the student with a new visa application.
 - iii. Please note that any new visa application must be within the 5-year cap for undergraduate degrees and within the allocated time limits of postgraduate study.
 - iv. If the student has not made good progress and/or has not achieved a minimum standard of work, the University can decide to end sponsorship when the visa expires.

- d. Keep the University (his/her sponsor) up to date with a local living address, mobile telephone number and any other relevant contact details. This can be done through the University's self-service portal.

- e. Keep the University informed of personal circumstances that might keep the student from engaging with his/her programme
 - i. If a student's personal circumstances change such as an illness, bereavement, financial difficulty or other issue, the student must contact the University to explain their circumstances. The University offers comprehensive support and guidance for all of its students and students should contact studentaffairs@richmond.ac.uk

12. Please note that any violation of the terms of a student visa including working without authorisation, activity that constitutes fraud or any criminal act committed while sponsored by the University may result in immediate dismissal and a report to the UK Home Office as required.

13. Should a student be unhappy with the University's decision on visa sponsorship (such as non-academic dismissal, visa curtailment or refusal to sponsor a new application), they should initially consult the University's Non-Academic Complaints Policy submit an informal complaint to studentaffairs@richmond.ac.uk

